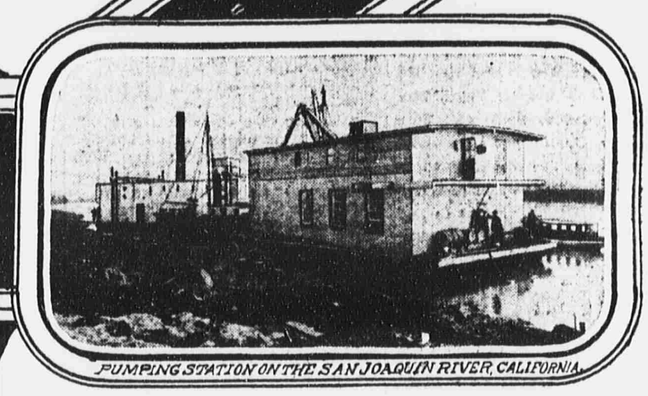
Farms With a Way of Going Up in Smoke

A Holland in California Where Agriculture Is Carried On Under Conditions Not Matched Anywhere Else in the World---The Very Ground Burns When It Catches Fire---At Other Times It Yields Fortunes to Its Owners---Farming With Machinery.

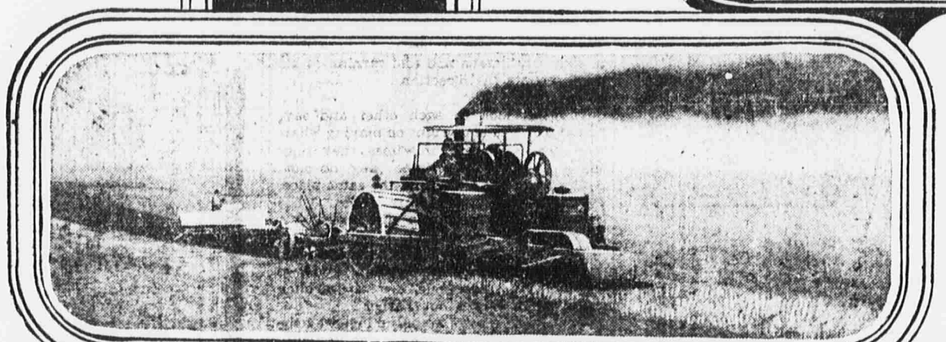
HARVESTING BY MACHINERY.

UP TO THEIR KNEES IN ASHES.

BURNING PEAT LAND IN CALIFORNIA.



PUMPING STATION ON THE SAN JOAQUIN RIVER, CALIFORNIA.



TRACTION ENGINE PLOWING.

STOCKTON, Cal., Nov. 20.—The last area of the delta islands of the San Joaquin River will be put into wheat this winter, and ground fires, the terror of the island farmer, are a thing of the past. For in that part of California the good brown earth, which is supposed to be uninflammable until the Judgment Day, has a way of catching fire and burning in spite of hose companies, steam dredgers and ditches. Many a good crop has been burned by catching fire from these earth furnaces, which sometimes smoulder for two years.

These delta lands are an imitation of Holland in the New World. The Sacramento and San Joaquin are widespreading streams. Like most Californian rivers, they are wide, rushing torrents in winter and not much more than creeks in summer.

Toward their mouths they used to spread irregularly over a district twenty miles wide in some places, finding a new channel every winter. All over that district was a thick growth of tule—a fat six foot reed.

Here millions of wild ducks and geese used to feed on the seeds of the tule. It is still one of the greatest ducking grounds in the country.

Along in the early '70s California capitalists began to study these deltas with a view to reclaiming them. It was found that the decayed tules had formed a light, rich soil twenty or thirty feet deep on the river bed. The needles of the great mountain forests from which the San Joaquin rises had added to its richness and sand from the placer diggings in the Sierra had tied it down.

They began to dike out islands in the middle of the river, fending it back by heavy walls of earth and rubble. The first island carved out—Rough and Ready, it is called—was a gold mine.

Those were the days when wheat prices were high, and the crops taken off this land were incredibly large. Rough and Ready, devoted at the present time to fruit and to the rearing of blooded dairy cattle, is now one of the most productive areas in California.

The farmers went into it on a larger scale. They carved out Union Island and Bouldin Island, further down the river, and began work on the mouth of the Sacramento. Then their troubles began.

Every new island tied up the river channel a little more and made the force of the spring torrents greater. Dikes began to burst, in spite of reenforcements and of steam dredgers

It was a twenty year fight before the owners of delta lands were sure of their dikes Even now the news of a heavy rainfall in the Sierra will send delta farmers scurrying from their clubs in San Francisco to the scene of action.

Early in the game there appeared another new trouble. Those lands, after they had dried out and before they were tied down by the first year's crops, would burn up on the slightest provocation.

The tule reed packs in a mass something like peat. When dry it burns with a slow, sullen flame, like a fire in a sawdust pile.

The regular process of reclamation is to get the dike built hard and fast, leaving a kind of swamp, and then to pump out the water. After that it is left through one dry baking California summer to get ready for the plough.

A spark from a combined harvester or from a distant grain fire would set it going. Then it would smoulder and smoulder, advancing perhaps only a few inches a day, but burning down as far as hard pan.

It was found to be a most persistent kind of fire. In the early days they used to run lines of hose from the dredgers and pump in water by the million barrels.

When the fire seemed to be all out they would draw off the hose. In a week, after the wet area had dried, the fire would break out again. It often took two summers for it to run its course in any given area.

Tule land burns to a coral pink ash. A burning area shows its condition only by a light smoke, like a morning mist, which covers the whole area.

It is a treacherous thing. A man stepping into it will sink clear out of sight. In past times several farmhands have walked into burning areas at night and been smothered by the hot, treacherous ashes.

Perhaps the biggest fire of all broke out in the '80s along the northern shore of Union Island. It burned for two years and consumed thousands of acres.

The farmers had not learned then that burning does not injure the land materially. The owner tried to stop it by piercing the dikes and running in ditches. He irrigated the land in every direction and kept the water on for weeks. When the flow was stopped and the land dried the fire went on to its finish.

That land is bearing wheat with six foot stalks this year, for burning seems to take little out of the soil—it is only a delay.

After the land is thoroughly burned it is left fallow until the rains of two winters have packed the ash. Then it is ploughed and planted like any other land.

The days of dear wheat are over. There is very little in that business now, even on the broad areas of California. It is only lately, however, that the owners of delta lands have begun to put their incredibly rich soil to other purposes.

A Chinaman, one Wong Jim, showed them the way. One summer he approached a Stockton landholder and asked permission to plant some delta lands in potatoes on shares.

The American refused. Wong came back with another proposition. He would rent the land, cash down, for its average profit in wheat and an advance of a few dollars an acre.

On that basis he went to work, much joked by the American farmers. Next year the Texas potato crop failed and the East had a poor crop, but Wong Jim dug out potatoes like nuggets and sold them at famine prices. He returned to China next year to live as a magnate on a fortune estimated at $40,000.

Then Bouldin Island found that the land was prime soil for asparagus. Small fortunes were picked up there from canned asparagus for the Eastern markets.

Still three-fourths of the islands are ye in grain. When in the dry California mid-summer the wheat and barley are ready fo the sickle the scenery of the islands i curious.

It is just one sea of gold, perfectly leve On three sides, perhaps, the grain fiel reaches to the horizon. On the fourth a low embankment with a line of trees show where the dikes hold back the river.

There are no fences; the landholders mark boundaries by ditches. There are very few houses. The islands are not comfortable places for homes, and most of the owners live on the mainland.

When the grain is yellow and drooping big traction engines come in from the main land, drawing those combined harvesters peculiar to a California harvest.

The combined harvester is mower, threshing machine and sacker rolled into one. It is a gigantic piece of machinery, almost as big as a Mogul locomotive. Among the intricacies of its beams and levers stand the eight men who run it.

The machine goes along behind the engine nearly as fast as a man can walk. A twenty-foot scythe cuts the stalks just below the head, and drops them on a canvas belt.

A moment later a man on the other side of the machine pulls a lever. Three sacks of grain and a little pile of chaff drop in the swath. The stalks are left standing to be ploughed under for fertilizer next spring.

Two boys in a light wagon holding a water barrel go behind, watching to put out any incipient fire in the stubble—for it has not rained for two months, and a fire in those fields would run like a mill race, consuming not only the grain fields but also the newly reclaimed lands waiting for the plough.

A Providential Likeness

Pursuers of the Big Diamond, the Glory of Sinde, Exchange Identities.

"Clothes make the man, the want of them the fellow," Pope might have said had he ever experienced the revulsion of feeling that swept over me when my captors led me in the guise of an unknown tramp, dirty, ragged, dishevelled, all stained with grime and blood, from the deserted house where they had arrested me in the very presence of the murdered Peters.

The contrast with the smug respectability which as Maecenas Badger, an obscure but reputable practitioner of the law, I had hitherto enjoyed was too much for me. And so I shambled along, hanging my head, ashamed to speak lest I should utter the argot of the wretched class to which all appearances said I belonged.

The posse were dignified and orderly, drawn from a higher grade of society than deputies are usually chosen from, and the cause of this difference lay in the character of their leader, the Sheriff of the county, Col. Grantley, as one and all addressed him.

The Colonel, a fine, soldierly man, had accepted office in order that he might secure proper protection for his family and his neighbors in their country homes. Rich, independent, cultivated, habituated to luxury, he yet devoted his time and energies to the task of ridding the county of the yeggmen who had terrorized it. As a consequence, the farmers served him enthusiastically and obeyed him implicitly.

We proceeded down the road for a mile, a picturesque group, the lanterns and torches showing the stalwart men with their rifles, and myself in the midst of them, with gyves upon my wrists, like Eugene Aram—an indescribable figure of penury and woe. Then the Colonel called a halt.

"It is so late, men," he said, "that I shall take this culprit to my house for the night, confining him under guard. As his examination must take place before Squire Main, my neighbor, in the morning, it would be useless to send him to the county jail. Besides, you know, he may also be implicated——"

Here the Colonel lowered his tones, but I seemed to catch the name of Mildred Talbott, my former pupil, whose love I had not rightly valued—whose repugnance was now a festering sore to me.

The men stepped off briskly as if the order was an agreeable one, and presently we were entering a stately mansion. None of the household was visible in the hall besides the bowing servants, but as they hustled me through into a sort of strong room in the rear, with iron grating over its only window, I was conscious of fair heads peering over the successive baluster rails, of feminine voices excitedly whispering.

I was slung in, unceremoniously, on the stone floor. A pannikin of water was thrust beside me. The door slammed shut, the locks grated rustily.

And there I lay in the darkness, listening, while the men marched away, the Colonel stalked upstairs, the servants set everything to rights again for the night; listening until the peace of slumber, broken only by the pacing to and fro of the sentinel before my door, had fallen on the house, leaving me hopeless, inert.

And yet, after the space of an hour I should say, I did hear a sound, faint but persistent, like the timid gnawing of a mouse. It was not in the room, though, nor the baseboards, the ceiling, the flooring.

I sat up; I strained my eyes. The night was overcast; the window was set in a deep embrasure. Still, it did seem that there was a deeper shadow, not quite covering the width of the casement—a shadow that moved cautiously, and from whose movements that grating sound originated.

I crept over to the window; I cautiously raised the sash, when my groping hand was seized in a strong grasp.

"Gintly now with thim bars, Mr. Badger," said a welcome voice. "They're apt to make as much n'ise over losin' a place as anny public stiff. There; fust wan and thin the odder; a soft snap, as often happens, is the end of thim bot'."

It was Mickandy. With a turn and a twist of silent celerity, he severed the bars and leaped lightly into the room.

"This is a fine villa, Mr. Badger," he whispered. "It orter be healthy for all consarned; but yit I fear there is somethin' catchin' about it. Whin in doubt about a ch'ice of sides, sez the prophet, take the outside ivery time. An' so, column to the cinter, right oblique, dooble quick and thribble quiet, m-a-arch."

"No," I replied doggedly, "I won't go. I've heard quite enough from the talk of the posse to know that the woods are full of armed men guarding every exit. What chance would we have of escape, a couple of tatterdemalions, without a cent between us——"

"Whist, Mr. Badger, I have the big di'mond, the Glory of Sinde itself, in my inside pocket——"

For a moment I seemed to see the yellow radiance of that marvellous gem breaking through the opacity like struggling moonlight. For a moment I seemed to feel again its magic, tingling in my veins, firing my heart with the lust of possession. Then the rayless night of despair settled even more thickly.

"You might just as well have an uncertified check to your order for a million, Mickandy," I retorted bitterly. "I am sick of this degradation; sick of looking and feeling like a scarecrow——"

"Don't, Mr. Badger, or you'll have me reachin' out and draggin' down leary t'ings like the oldest boorder in a funny house. You orter remimber thet dirt and mire are the inivitable attindants of a big di'mond from the time it was fust scooped from the mud of its nativity.

"Besides, you're in a pickle for fair, as the cowcumber said whin it struck the brine. They'll not unly hang you for the scoffin' of Peters, but they'll soak you tin year at hard labor for deductin' the girl.

"Howiver, it's plain to be seen thet, like a new babby in an inbucator, you're squilched by a sinse of your invironmints. You're down on your luck, but for mussy sake don't be down on your pluck, for pluck is wuss than a lost child in not knowin' how to come home agin.

"I've a rimidy to suggist—desprit', yis; but thet's what sech cases as yourn require, an' be damned to thim."

And then Mickandy went on to say that, surmising shrewdly the destination of the posse, he had reached the house by a short cut some time ahead of it. While he was waiting in the shadow of the side veranda a cab drove up and a young man alighted.

This visitor explained to the butler that he was Adolph Cramer, lately arrived from England with letters from Col. Grantley's brother residing there, which he presented. He apologized for the unseasonableness of the hour, attributing it to delays along the road, and expressed the hope that none of the inmates would be aroused or disturbed.

In his turn the butler explained that his master was abroad on important public duties, and that as his return was uncertain the household had all retired. He suggested that he would show Mr. Cramer to a room and make him comfortable for the night, promising that whenever the Colonel did get back he would hasten to extend his hospitalities in person.

To this the young man demurred, pleading extreme fatigue and the need of rest.

"And I t'ink meself," continued Mickandy, "thet like the ship thet brought him over, he'd a load aboord. It was as difficult steerin' up the stairs as if he wore rollin' in the troff, at least half seas over.

"The butler was on to him, for he helped him into bed all right, and out of rispict for favors to come, no doubt, niver mentioned his arrival to the Colonel. Now, sir, wan t'ing is certain; he's dead to the wurrold for the rist of the night.

"I bint over him meself, not an hour sence, hevin' worked me way into his room be the over-roof route. Old Orfice has got him down and out; you might fire off a cannon be his ear, and he wudn't do more'n to tunn over and say 'Come in.'

"What's the matter, thin, with your shavin' and cleanin' of yourself in his bat'room; with your arrayin' of yourself in his pupple and fine linen? You're bot' alike as two peas, though your pod for the prisent is the dirtier. What's the matter with my follerin' suit in the suit of his follerer; for there's the bag of his valet who's expicted here in the marn.

"And thin, hevin' scoffed anny collat lavin' about loose and keerless, off we goes, master and man, in the height of fashun, to split up the glory of Sinde and bear the di'mond market of the worrold with the chips."

Even while Mickandy spoke I felt courage, hope and the fierce exultation of strife against odds revive within me. Even before he had finished I was pressing my way through the narrow space the bars had occupied.

In an instant he was at my side, leading and guiding. We crept around the house, we ascended a trellis at the side; we wormed along the veranda roof. We slipped noiselessly through the window into the room.

The light had been turned low; yet we could distinguish the setting of the furniture—the dim outline of the bed in the further corner—as we poised breathlessly on tiptoe.

The silence of death prevailed. Mickandy clutched my arm.

"I don't like this," he hissed. "Whin I was here before, he was goin' it wuss than a high prissure ingine stuck on a bar."

We stole over to the bed—it was empty; to the chair, where the butler had arranged Cramer's clothes—they were gone.

"He has flewed the coop," muttered Mickandy. "Why, why, why?"

As we stood facing each other, aghast, I saw the stupefaction on Mickandy's face change into alarm, chagrin, disgust. He slapped his chest; he groaned.

"We're done up by a post gradooate crook," he moaned. "He must hev whipped the di'mond from me pocket whin I bint over him. Kick me, please, Mr. Badger."

For a second, a suspicion of Mickandy's good faith swept over me; but his grief was too real; my recollection of his devotion too fresh. Besides, if it had been a question of cash, that might have been a different matter; but a preeminent gem like the Glory of Sinde! Oh, no; Mickandy would never act as keeper of a white elephant.

"At least we are free," I said, kindly. "Come, Mickandy, if you will help me back to the garb and state of a gentleman I'll forgive you anything."

In an hour we emerged from the dressing-room a renovated and remodelled pair. As I looked into the mirror I felt as if I should take off my hat and bow low before my own likeness.

As for Mickandy, he rivalled in decency the most decent of serving men. Talk about appearances being deceptive; they are, and that is why they are effective.

"But Mickandy," I asked, as I observed closer, "why did you leave those little sideboards of whiskers? I never have worn any such things."

"Nope, Mr. Badger, you niver sported thim," he replied, "but Cramer did, may the divil go with him. And now y' are so like, it wud be hard to say whether y' are himsilf or his twin ——"

"I know which I am when I think of the Glory of Sinde ——"

"Listen, sir. I reflicted much durin' the dicorous silence of t'ilet, and I'm sure you're better off here for this prisint than annywhere ilse.

"You kin take off Cramer without trouble—why the butler wud swear to you; while I'll show up bright and early as your vally de sham, and a good name, too, under the circumstances. The house is full of guests, and there orter be some good pickings betune two days.

"On the odder hand, there'll be rumpus enough in the marn over the disappearance of the suspicted murderer—you know who; the country will be up in arms, and how can you avide suspicion if as Cramer you also take yourself off as my sterusly as you——"

"Don't multiply instances, Mickandy," I interrupted joyously, "I agree for the very fun of it."

It was true. My spirits were exuberant. I yearned for excitement—the fence and finesse of a false position skilfully maintained.

As Cramer I would cut loose from old associations, old disappointments, old complications. I would gain a new existence, in which Gratz, my taskmaster, in which Mildred Talbott, my disdainful sweetheart, could have no part. Surely the Glory of Sinde itself was but a small price to pay for such a fresh personality.

Besides, Cramer might come back—his letters, his wardrobe, his elaborate preparations, all showed that his scheme in coming had been an important one. He might come back, believing that Mickandy had been some midnight marauder, and deeming it prudent to hold the Glory of Sinde until the success of his former venture gave him a surer standing.

True, he would know me as an impostor, but then it wasn't likely that, having taken so unceremonious a leave, he would again appear in the same guise.

"I'll take these duds along with me," said Mickandy, gathering up our discarded rags. "We want no sech ividence of ab-original sin. Besides, sir," he concluded, as he crept out on the roof, winking the while most enigmatically, "it's bist allers to be prepared for a Provident'al emergincy."

I was at once too light of heart and too weary of body to puzzle over this parting problem. In a moment I was fast asleep, and when I roused, refreshed and buoyant, the sunlight was streaming full and strong into the room.

I was scarcely dressed before Col. Grantley entered, hearty of welcome, profuse of apologies.

"And the worst of it is, Mr. Cramer," he explained with a whimsical smile, "that no matter how hard an amateur in office, such as I must confess myself, tries, he is sure to spoil everything by some stupid blunder.

"We captured the very head devil of these yeggmen last night, a most audacious villain, red handed from a brutal murder, undoubtedly guilty of a hundred other crimes; but through our neglecting to search him he managed to saw through the bars and make his escape.

"However, my men have been scouring the woods since daybreak, and you may after all have the opportunity of seeing how a criminal examination is conducted in this country. My brother writes me that you have studied in the Inns of Law."

As we were passing through the entrance hall to the breakfast room I noticed an eminently respectable servitor in discreet livery bowing from his station by the lower stairs. It was Mickandy—a transformed Mickandy in expression as well as dress; for some amazing intelligence was fairly praying deliverance from every feature.

The Colonel waved him back, as he ventured to draw near.

"Your master hasn't time for you now, my good fellow," he said curtly, "you may go up to his room."

And Mickandy obeyed, looking unutterable things.

A few of the guests were already down, by whom I was pleasantly greeted, but there were many empty chairs.

"Tardiness is really a virtue after a night so broken by excitement," said the Colonel, as he signalled the butler to serve.

But the orderly progress of the meal was destined to be rudely interrupted. There was a shout, the hurry of feet in the hall, and a farmer, whom I recognized as one of the deputies conspicuous in my arrest, came slamming into the room.

"We've got him, sir," he cried in high, excitement. "Thunder in winter, but we nabbed him buried in sleep behind a hedge. He's so heavy with it now he don't half know where he is, unless, by gum, he's trying to bamboozle."

"That stupid game won't serve him twice," exclaimed the Colonel springing from his seat. "Come, my friend, if you would see one of the rankest weeds of our civilization."

We passed out into the hallway. I peered through the ranks of excited deputies at a figure, hopeless, inert—the personification of woe.

I started back, stiff with amazement. It was I, as I had been the night before, dirty, dishevelled—the same rags, the same grime and blood. It was I, the unknown tramp, too disgusted, too sick of self, to venture a word of defence.

Then as I gazed more closely through the stains and muck plastering the face, I detected the outlines of little sideboards of whiskers; and all the more amazed I began to understand.

No wonder Mickandy was almost bursting to explain; no wonder he had looked unutterable things.

In some way he had come upon the fleeing guest, the simon-pure Cramer. In some way he had trapped him and stupefied him; thrusting him into my rags, remodelling him into the vile semblance of what I had been. Not only had I assumed his place, but he had taken mine; and now he was the Orson and I the Valentine.

"Take that man into the office," directed the Colonel; "and one of you run over and ask Squire Main if he will be so good as to come here for a criminal examination, and then honor us with his presence at luncheon. Come, Mr. Cramer, court is about to convene, and you must take your place as a visiting jurist on the bench."

He led the way into a large room in the rear, plainly furnished. A long table had been placed along one end, behind which we seated ourselves, leaving a larger chair for the presiding magistrate.

At one side sat, or rather huddled, the prisoner, his elbows on his knees, his face in his hands, the world well or ill forgot. At the other end pressed an increasing crowd of spectators, with Mickandy on a bench high above them all, his finger, for my edification, on his nose. Lining the walls, the deputies were stationed, grave and stalwart, as they leaned on their rifles.

"The charge against this man is homicide, I think you said?" I remarked to pass away the time that was beginning to grow anxious.

"Yes, that is the principal charge," the Colonel replied reflectively, "but I have a shrewd suspicion that he was also implicated—Bless my soul, we might as well settle the question of identification while we wait."

And beckoning to one of his men he gave some whispered direction.

"You must know, Mr. Cramer," he continued, "that the countryside has been harried and harassed by the yeggmen beyond endurance. Why, a week ago we had a house party of young folks, friends of my daughters, staying here. They went picnicking for the day in a beautiful dell not a mile from the place, by Jove! and do you know those execrable scoundrels had the audacity to kidnap one of the loveliest——"

There was a stir in the hallway, a parting by the door, and a fair young girl entered. She advanced modestly to the desk; then she raised her eyes, gazing full into mine. It was Mildred Talbott.

Football in Mexico.

From the Philadelphia Bulletin.

At the end of the first half he rose in his seat and lighted a cigar.

"Mexican football," he said, "is not like this. It is called gomae. The ball is of wood, and weighs five pounds. The course is three miles long and eight yards wide.

"Three players, each with a ball, start simultaneously from one goal, and the man who kicks his ball first to the goal three miles distant wins the game.

"It is an exciting game and a fast game. Three mounted surgeons follow the players, for, kicking so heavy a ball, it frequently happens that a toe or an ankle is broken."

THE RUSH CITYWARD.

Continued Decline in Population of Rural Counties in This State.

Twenty-one of the sixty-one counties of New York had fewer inhabitants by the census of 1900 than they had by the census of 1890. These counties, which include one-half of the area of the State, showed a falling off in ten years ranging from a few hundreds of inhabitants in some small counties to several thousands in some of the larger ones.

Essex county, in northern New York, for instance, declined from 33,000 to 30,700 in the ten years. Wayne county, in western New York, famous for apples and mint, declined from 49,700 to 48,600.

By many persons this decline in population was attributed to the continuance between 1893 and 1897 of a period of industrial hard times, the general effect of which is to diminish population in rural or semi-rural districts. In such times, the demand for employment being decreased and the provision for public relief in farming counties being small, the larger cities are sought by needy persons, and these conditions are reflected in the ensuing census.

The years between 1900 and 1905 having been marked by prosperity and abundance throughout the State, it was supposed that the decline in population in interior counties would cease, that some of the former loss would be regained, and that, perhaps, improved conditions would be reflected in the census figures of this year, which show the entire population of New York to be more than 8,000,000, an increase of 11 per cent. compared with the census of five years ago.

Instead of this, however, the recently completed State census shows that twenty-one of the sixty-one counties have fewer inhabitants than they had five years ago. Some of those which show the largest decrease in five years are Chemung, which includes the city of Elmira, heretofore one of the largest manufacturing towns in the southern tier, and Steuben, one of the most fertile of the farming counties in the same region. The falling off in Chemung in five years was 2,458 and in Steuben 1,007.

Some of the counties of the State which do not show a decline in five years show at least very little gain. One of these is Dutchess, which includes the city of Poughkeepsie, and which is one of the best known of the dairy and farming counties of the State. Five years ago the population was 81,670; this year it is 81,689—a gain of nineteen persons.

Delaware county, the chief distinction of which is that it includes more Prohibition territory than any other county in New York, has increased from 46,415 to 46,78 only during five years of enormous State growth.

Among other counties which have lost in population in the last five years are Otsego, famed for hops; Oswego, noted for starch and starch works; Clinton, which includes the city of Plattsburg; Schoharie, Cayuga, which includes the city of Ithaca, Greene, which includes the city of Catskill, Hamilton in the Adirondacks, Fulton and Madison counties in the interior, and Warren, which increases its agricultural products every year, but continues to lose steadily in population.

No other State of the country has so large a proportion of counties which are falling behind in population as New York, that is none of the larger States. The explanation of these changes is found probably in the enormous increase in manufacturing interests.

In five years Schenectady has jumped from 46,000 to 71,000 population, Rockland from 38,000 to 45,000, Niagara from 74,00 to 84,000, and Westchester from 184,000 t 228,000.

In fifteen years the population of New York has increased 21 per cent., yet one-third of the counties have fewer inhabitants than they had fifteen years ago.